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**Catholic Extension receives $1M Thriving Congregations grant**

**from Lilly Endowment Inc.**

*Funds will support programming that gives a greater voice to ethnically diverse parishes in marginalized communities and shares their cultural heritage and gifts on a national scale*

CHICAGO (October 15, 2020) — Chicago-based [Catholic Extension](http://www.catholicextension.org/) announced today that it has received a grant of $1M from Lilly Endowment Inc. to help establish the Initiative for Parishes and Peoples on the Peripheries. The program is funded through Lilly Endowment’s Thriving Congregations Initiative, which aims to strengthen Christian congregations so they can help people deepen their relationships with God, build strong relationships with each other and contribute to the flourishing of local communities and the world.

Since 1905, Catholic Extension has supported poor faith communities and currently works in 87 Catholic dioceses with supporters from all 50 states. Its legacy is the more than 12,600 churches and church facilities the organization has helped build. Catholic Extension’s network of parishes is financially poorer and more ethnically diverse than the rest of the U.S. Church. The central goal of the program being launched with the newly granted funds is to give a voice to these marginalized faith communities, which are rarely heard or seen by people in the broader Catholic Church. Yet, their cultural gifts can play a key role in revitalizing the faith.

At the parish level, the program will create a thriving congregation by building community, cultivating beauty and expressing mercy. “Our program seeks to enhance a sense of community and beauty, so that ultimately parishes can help their people become agents of mercy to a world in need of compassion and hope,” said Father Jack Wall, president of Catholic Extension.

Over the course of four years, the program will help tell the stories and share the cultural and artistic traditions of at least 300 ethnically diverse parishes throughout the United States. During the same period, the organization will also convene 250 parish leaders by bringing them to existing Catholic Extension gatherings with other Church leadership to create a community of learning, clarify their mission and values and have greater access to other Church leaders and influencers.

“These communities are uniquely endowed with cultural gifts, ranging from music and dance to art, fashion and foods,” said Joe Boland, vice president of mission, who will spearhead the program. “Without the opportunity to share their heritage, those without a platform don’t have the chance to pass on their traditions, and we are robbed of the experience. It is a loss for the entire Church which stands to benefit from learning the faith perspectives and sharing the cultural richness of all members of the Body of Christ.  We are grateful to the Lilly Endowment to be able to create a program to not only shine a spotlight on these communities but also to give them an opportunity to participate in gatherings on a national scale to learn and to be heard.”

Catholic Extension is one of 92 organizations taking part in the Lilly initiative, which represents churches in a broad spectrum of Christian traditions, including Anabaptist, Baptist, Episcopal, evangelical, Lutheran, Methodist, Mennonite, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Reformed, Restoration, Roman Catholic and Orthodox, as well as congregations that describe themselves as nondenominational. Several organizations serve congregations in Black, Hispanic and Asian-American traditions.

“In the midst of a rapidly changing world, Christian congregations are grappling with how they can best carry forward their ministries,” said Christopher Coble, Lilly Endowment’s vice president for religion. “These grants will help congregations assess their ministries and draw on practices in their theological traditions to address new challenges and better nurture the spiritual vitality of the people they serve.”

Lilly Endowment launched the Thriving Congregations Initiative in 2019 as part of its commitment to support efforts that enhance the vitality of Christian congregations. Lilly Endowment is making nearly $93 million in grants through the initiative. The grants will support organizations as they work directly with congregations and help them gain clarity about their values and missions, explore and understand better the communities in which they serve, and draw upon their theological traditions as they adapt ministries to meet changing needs.

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**About Catholic Extension:**Founded in 1905, Catholic Extension works in solidarity with people in America’s poorest regions to build up vibrant and transformative Catholic faith communities. For more information visit [www.catholicextension.org](http://www.catholicextension.org/); follow us on Facebook at [facebook.com/catholicextension](http://www.facebook.com/catholicextension) or on twitter at [@CathExtension](http://www.twitter.com/cathextension).

**About Lilly Endowment Inc.:** Lilly Endowment Inc. is an Indianapolis-based private philanthropic foundation created in 1937 by J.K. Lilly Sr. and sons Eli and J.K. Jr. through gifts of stock in their pharmaceutical business, Eli Lilly & Company. Although the gifts of stock remain a financial bedrock of the Endowment, it is a separate entity from the company, with a distinct governing board, staff and location. In keeping with the founders’ wishes, the Endowment exists to support the causes of religion, education and community development. The Endowment funds significant programs throughout the United States, especially in the field of religion. However, it maintains a special commitment to its hometown, Indianapolis and home state, Indiana. The principal aim of the Endowment’s grantmaking in religion is to deepen and enrich the lives of Christians in the United States, primarily by seeking out and supporting efforts that enhance the vitality of congregations and strengthen their pastoral and lay leadership.